



Iowa Department of Public Health

Promoting and Protecting the Health of Iowans

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General Use of Face-Masks and Respirators to Prevent Novel Influenza A (H1N1) 1 May 2009

During this outbreak of swine influenza, many people have questions regarding the best way to protect themselves from becoming ill with the virus and, if you are ill, how to prevent spread of the disease to others.

The best protection is to take simple steps such as

- Frequently washing your hands with soap and water, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze
- Staying home and away from work, school, and other public places when you are ill

In addition to these simple steps, using face-masks or special face masks called respirators may also help to control the spread of influenza and should be used in certain instances.

What is a face-mask?

- Protects the wearer from splashes and other fluids, not small particles or microbes
- Prevents the wearer from spreading droplets, such as saliva containing the virus, to others
- A loose-fitting, disposable mask that cover the nose and mouth
- Does not create a tight seal around the face
- Often used in medical and dental settings
- Use once and throw away

When should I wear a face-mask?

- If you are ill and need to be in close contact (less than 3 to 6 feet) with other people

What is a respirator?

- Prevents the wearer from breathing in small particles, including viruses
- Fits tightly to your face to create a tight seal so air only flows through the respirator
- May be disposable (one time use) or reusable with disposable cartridges
- Facial hair and scars may prevent a tight seal, thus preventing the respirator from working correctly
- People with high blood pressure, heart or lung disease, or other health issues may have difficult breathing while using a respirator and should check with their health care provider
- Should be listed as "NIOSH Approved"

When should I use a respirator?

- You are well and you will be in close contact with people who are ill with swine influenza, such as health care workers and people caring for ill family or friends

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/swineflu/masks.htm